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**Remarks of
The Honorable William Delahunt of Massachusetts
Honoring Station Menemsha as the Recipient of the Sumner I. Kimball Award**

**US House of Representatives
February 14, 2008**

Madam Speaker-

I rise today to honor United States Coast Guard Station Menemsha, of Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, as the recipient of the prestigious Sumner I. Kimball Readiness Award.

The Kimball Award is a rarity in the United States Coast Guard, as very few units attain this level of outstanding performance. It demands a grade of 90 percent or higher during a rigorous week-long inspection, requiring a combination of exemplary test scores, crew proficiency, superb vessel condition, excellent performance in drills, a successful and progressive unit training program, survival systems readiness and good administrative work by all members.

This award is named after the Maine native who introduced training, performance standards and accountability into the life saving organization that eventually became the Coast Guard. This honor is extremely difficult to achieve, and even more noteworthy considering the high-tech vessel the crew must master and maintain, the 47-foot Motor Lifeboat. Of the 200 Coast Guard stations throughout the country, only a handful receive the Kimball Award, and only two stations that operate the 47-foot MLB were so honored.

Station Menemsha's remarkable achievement is not just about receiving an award; it is a testament to the professionalism and dedication that each member of the station brings to the job. In their line of work, readiness and competence is the difference between life and death.

I would like to congratulate and recognize Station Chief Steve Barr and the men and women stationed at Menemsha for their exemplary service:

BM3 Dustin Shaw, BM2 Matthew Sponable, BM2 Bill Robertson, SK2 Rachel Glade, MK3 Christopher Guice, FN Julie Lopatka, BMCM Jack Downey, BMC Chris Bobrowski, FN Shannon Heintzelman, BM3 Rajeah Wilson, BM2 Lance Nelligan, MK3 Greg Lockwood, SN Derek Perendy, BM3 Daniel Carrillo, MK1 Mike Micucci, MK2 Nicholas Prescott, SN Jarrett Dube, RADM Timothy Sullivan, MK3 Andrew Chace, BM2 Patrick Bryant, BM3 Andrew Leblanc, BM3 Joe Pancotti, CAPT Raymond Perry, and BM3 Mark Chaknis.

I would also like to submit the following article from January 31, 2008 that appeared in the Martha's Vineyard Times into the record:

"Station Menemsha Wins Rare Readiness Award"

By Steve Myrick- January 31, 2008

Last summer, a fishing boat in a dangerous stretch of water off Aquinnah was taking on water. The call for help came to United States Coast Guard Station Menemsha.

Petty officer second class Lance Nelligan scrambled his crew, and guided the station's 47-foot motor lifeboat to the distressed vessel, where the fishing crew was moments away from abandoning their sinking boat.

"They came across Devil's Bridge," said petty officer Nelligan, "bounced a couple of rocks, split a whole bunch of big cracks in the bottom of their hull. We were able to get out there, we put two people on board to rig a pump and get the boat pumped."

Petty officer Nelligan recounts the story of his day's work the way most people mention writing a sales report, replacing a fan belt, or waiting on a customer. The skill, training, and preparation of his crew saved a valuable boat and got two very grateful fisherman safely back to port. But to him, it's no big deal.

But the Sumner I. Kimball Award? Now that's a big deal to petty officer Nelligan. "To have somebody come in and say the job that you're doing is award worthy, is a really big deal," he said. "The things that we're tested on, it's absolutely everything you can think of. It takes a lot, a lot, a lot of work to keep those boats ready, and keep the crew ready."

"In my mind," adds petty officer second class Bill Robertson, "this is almost the Super Bowl of the Coast Guard."

Boat of note

The Kimball award is named for the Maine native who introduced training, performance standards, and accountability into the life saving organization that eventually became the Coast Guard.

The honor is extremely difficult to achieve, and even more noteworthy considering the high-tech vessel the crew must master and maintain. It is a test of readiness, including the condition of the vessel, along with the skill and training of the crew, administered by inspectors so tough that they inspire awe among the enlisted men and women.

"This isn't flag football, everybody gets a trophy sort of a deal," said rear admiral Tim Sullivan, who flew to the Island to present the honor to station personnel this past Friday. Admiral Sullivan commands the Coast Guard's first district, which includes eight Northeast states and 2000 miles of coastline from the Maine to northern New Jersey.

Of more than 200 Coast Guard stations throughout the country, only a handful receive the Kimball award, and only two stations that operate the 47-foot motor lifeboat were so honored.

"It's the most complicated boat we have, it's a beast of a machine," said Lieutenant commander Chris Cederholm, who represented Coast Guard Group Woods Hole at the ceremony.

"This award will become a benchmark," admiral Sullivan said. "You guys really set a benchmark as a crew. Your outstanding performance is really your gift to a lot of future generations. A lot of folks will follow behind you, they will have to stand on a lot of big blue shoulders. People are going to be standing on your shoulders. This is a day you'll look back on, maybe when you're an old grey admiral. Think about that legacy, of people that will follow behind you."

Coast Guard petty officers (left to right) BM2 Bill Robertson and BM2 Lance Nelligan were all smiles, holding the pennant they will fly aboard Station Menemsha's 47-foot motor lifeboat. The pennant symbolizes the Kimball award, earned by only one other boat of this kind in the entire Coast Guard this year. [Click photo for larger version.](#)

Tough test

Seven months after the grueling evaluation, MK first class Mike Micucci, the head engineer, still scolds himself about one of the most serious faults the inspectors found in the material condition of his vessel: a missing screw in a plastic cover. It was nothing that would have interfered in the boat's operation, but it cost him a precious point in the rating system.

"I can't believe I missed that," said petty officer Micucci. "The guys that come and do the inspections, they know what to look for, you have to be one step ahead of them."

Senior station chief Steve Barr was unable to attend the ceremony. At the moment his station personnel received the award, he was welcoming newborn son Isaac into the world.

"He's got a good excuse," said Admiral Sullivan. "Another little Coastie coming along."

"I wish I could have been there, absolutely," said chief Barr. "It's a joy for me that my crew got this award, with or without me. The fact that we got this Kimball with the 47-foot motor lifeboat is just amazing. It's a big deal, and we have a lot of junior people there. They did exceptionally well. I'm very proud of all their hard work."

Ready and able

As difficult as the Kimball award is to get, it is not difficult to understand how the station achieved the honor. Speaking to the personnel offers a glimpse of the professionalism, pride, and dedication which courses through the ranks. They understand that the award represents more than passing an exam on a specific day. They know an engine leak, a poorly maintained pump, or a navigation error may mean points deducted from the Kimball award grade sheet. "They watch us plot position, lay down courses," said petty officer Nelligan. "How we organize the crew, how we get our boat set up, how we're going to respond. They're pretty much testing everything that could possibly go wrong."

The unit also realizes these things can mean life or death when it's not a drill. "We are a search and rescue station," said petty officer Nelligan. "It's the middle of the night, it's the middle of the day, during a meal, those are the times you really have to snap to and get the boats ready."

Petty officer Nelligan joined the Coast Guard shortly after the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City. "I wanted to be involved in some branch of the service that I knew was going to protect my family, and this country," said the Dennis native.

Petty officer Robertson, who grew up in Wrentham, is a six-year veteran of the Coast Guard. He flashes a broad grin when recalling the day chief Barr told the assembled crew that they had won the Kimball award. "Definitely a lot of big smiles and high fives," he said.

Petty officer Robertson likes the Menemsha assignment so much, he asked to extend his duty an extra year. "I like the whole Island vibe, the whole atmosphere," he said. "We have a blast in the summer, we have a really tight-knit crew here. We work hard and play hard."

The pride carries over to the town of Chilmark, which has come to think of the station as its own. "They are an integral part of our community," said Chilmark selectmen Frank Fenner Jr., who along with selectman Riggs Parker, and a large contingent of town officers, police officers, residents, attended the morning ceremony. "I'm proud that this station is doing so well."